

## CRSS Center

### Texas A&M University College of Architecture

#### Leadership, Innovation and the Process of Business Practice in the Design and Construction Industry

This is the first in a series of newsletters to come from the CRSS Center in the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University. The Center was established in 1991 based on initial endowment funding from CRSS and a major commitment by the Texas A&M University College of Architecture. Its purpose is the study of leadership, innovation and the process of business practice in the design and construction industry. The Center archives contain the business records as well as oral histories of CRSS.

To launch an academic center requires more than simply a goal and a direction, so this fall John O. Greer, Director of the Center, called together a group of people who are involved in the design and construction business to attempt to hone down the idea to manageable proportions and to help the Center's staff begin to do those things which are most likely to make a difference.

It seemed reasonable to utilize the programming techniques employed by CRSS which have since been immortalized in Willie Peña's book, *Problem Seeking*. Kurt Neubek, a CRSS programmer was asked to develop a series of concept cards to try to bring order and coherence to the work of the ad hoc advisory committee which included:

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Assistant to the Director, CRSS Center

**David R. Braden, FAIA**



Founder-Dahl Braden PTM, Architects, Dallas

**Thomas A. Bullock, FAIA**

A CRSS Founder

**John O. Greer, FAIA**

Director, CRSS Center

**Jonathan King, Hon. AIA**

Associate Director, CRSS Center

**Stephen A. Kliment, FAIA**

Editor, *Architectural Record*

**Michael M. McCarthy, ASLA**

Professor of Landscape Architecture

**Thomas L. McKittrick, FAIA**

Director, Graduate Programs,  
College of Architecture

**Kurt M. Neubek, AIA**

Vice President, CRSS Architects, Inc.

**Kevin F. Noon**

CRSS Center

**Walter V. Wendler**

Dean, College of Architecture

The group represented a diversified collection of people in terms of academic and professional backgrounds and experience, but didn't have any problem accepting the concept of a center in a school of architecture based on business practices of the design and construction industry. The fact that the Center was organized around business issues rather than design didn't seem to confuse or dismay the group at all. The three principal goals accepted by the group to which the CRSS Center should address itself were:

- The Center should develop an enlarged and accessible knowledge base for the industry;
- The roles of the building team members are changing and need redefinition; and
- There is insufficient knowledge of marketing in the design and construction industry.

The context of the design and construction



industry was explored in the “facts” section of the planning session. There were too many of these to review here, but a few of the more potent were:

- The globalization of the design and construction industry;
- The present pricing methods for services and fee structures don’t work;
- Demographics will impact the design and construction industry (e.g. in the '90s there will be 6 million more people in the 35 - 40 age group - all buying eyeglasses) more seriously the aging of the American population will have a major impact on where and how older Americans live;
- While recycling and adaptive reuse will assume increasing importance, population migration and technology driven buildings will continue to generate new construction;
- Computers and office automation continue to be major factors in the reordering of the industry;

Concepts in the lexicon of CRSS program-

ming are specific steps toward reaching goals. A number of those concepts emerged to help the CRSS Center begin pointing toward some of its future activities:

- Focus on researching marketing strategies for the design and construction industry;
- Provide case studies and comparative studies for students and professionals in the Center’s area of interest;
- Continue the collection and digitizing of oral histories of innovative business and management efforts;
- Prepare investigations and position papers;
- Establish focus groups and seminars to gather information and to explore issues;
- Generate funding for the Center through research. A likely source of research funding is state, county and local governments in Texas concerned with the management of public building programs.
- Encourage traditional research investigations;

- Explore how companies win and lose jobs; and
- Describe innovative approaches to marketing and positioning.

Concepts explored included concern about the successes and failures of innovation, exploration of corporate culture, and business ethics as well as other issues relating to the management and business in the design and construction industry.

Obviously not all of these things can occur simultaneously, but goal setting is a reasonable way to get started. As Yogi Berra was once quoted as saying “If you know where you’re going you’re more likely to get there.”

## **Center’s First Major Project: The CRSS Archives**

CRSS turned over its business archives to the

CRSS Center and these have been supplemented by a major project to develop an oral history of the firm. Over twenty-five present and former leaders of the firm have responded to questions so far in recorded sessions ranging from one to 14 hours. A number of other former leaders of the firm will be interviewed as well. These recordings as well as the printed archives are now being digitized for future use by historians and students of the design and construction industry. Other companies in the design and construction industry will be invited to contribute oral histories and archives to the Center and to assist with endowment funding to assure the Center's continuity and success.

Rapidly developing new technologies will supplement and occasionally replace traditional methods of how we deal with information, and how we conduct research, analyze data, and author reports. Technological tools used in the CRSS Center will accommodate these rapid changes and new applications while accommodating the mandated directions of the Center. The CRSS Archives project information (which includes contracts, correspondence, books, reports, magazine and journal articles, memos, slides, drawings, video, audio, and other text) will be stored digitally and manipulated with a hypermedia authoring system. Researchers will be able to construct a computer report or book that allows for the manipulation of all forms of media by the author and the reader. Some advantages of hypermedia associative indexing are: Information can be stored and consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility; items can be gathered together from separate

sources and bound together to form a new digital book. Any item can be joined in numerous trails to other items. A web of links to supplement the basic data base can add value to published collections of text and other information. A data base created this way provides the user not only with synthesized information, but the entire scaffolding by which it was erected; and, researchers can perform data analysis functions by importing programs into the authoring system.

The digitized data bases and authoring system will be available for researchers and students to enable them to work on topics of their own choice. The Center staff will be conducting research focused on the analysis of case management strategies, decision making, and major accomplishments that affect growth and development, innovation and leadership in the design and construction industry.

## **Information Transfer**

The CRSS Center is currently lending faculty for two courses on the business of architecture. One, for graduate students is taught by Tom Bullock the other for undergraduates is taught by Jonathan King.

## **How about your views?**

In future issues, this newsletter will be exploring some of the issues raised in the Center's

initial team planning session. If you would like to react to some of these, or raise other related issues, please consider this an invitation to write us a short statement which we may use in future issues. Of particular interest now would be your views on how you believe the roles of the participating players in the design and construction industry will change in the next decade.

## **The CRSS Center**

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